

REMARKS

Claims 15-23 and 37-43 are pending in this application. By this Amendment, claims 15-18, 21-23, 37 and 38 are amended, and claims 39-43 are added. No new matter is added. Reconsideration of the application is respectfully requested.

Amendments to claims 15-18 and 21-23 are supported in Fig. 2 and the specification at paragraphs [0107], [0108] and [0105], for example. Claims 39 and 40 are also supported in the specification at paragraphs [0107], [0108] and [0105], for example. Claim 41 is supported in Fig. 2 and the specification at paragraphs [0010], [0107], [0108] and [0105], for example. Claims 42 and 43 are supported in the specification at paragraph [0056], for example.

The Office Action rejects claims 15-23, 37 and 38 under 35 U.S.C. §112, second paragraph. Claims 15-18, 22 and 38 are amended to obviate the rejection. Thus, withdrawal of the rejection is respectfully requested.

The Office Action rejects claims 15-23 under 35 U.S.C. §103(a) over U.S. Patent No. 5,692,292 to Asai et al. (hereinafter Asai) in view of JP-4-123493 (hereinafter JP '493). This rejection is respectfully traversed.

Claim 15 recites, *inter alia*, that at least one operation performing apparatus including an element stocker, a transferring head movable relative to the element stocker, and at least one apparatus-side element-holding portion for holding the at least one first exchangeable constituent element. Claim 15 further recites automatically transferring, with the transferring head of the at least one operation performing apparatus, at least one second constituent element from the element carrier plate to the element stocker of the at least one operation performing apparatus, and automatically replacing at least one first constituent element held by the at least one apparatus-side element-holding portion of the at least one operation

performing apparatus, with the at least one second constituent element transferred to the element stocker.

Asai discloses, in Fig. 1 of Asai, a transfer type circuit board fabricating system including four working modules 12, 14, 16, 18 arranged in series. The working modules 12-18 include respective conveyor devices 56, 300, 300, 420 (Fig. 2 of Asai). However, Asai does not teach or suggest using an element carrier plate or an element stocker, as recited in claim 15.

JP '493 teaches, in Fig. 1 of JP '493, using an element carrier plate 10 to hold one or more suction nozzles 8, using a conveyor device 9 to convey the element carrier plate 10 to a transferring head 1 of an electronic-component mounting apparatus, and replacing a current suction nozzle 8 held by the transferring head 1 with one of the suction nozzles 8 held by the element carrier plate 10. However, like Asai, JP '493 does not teach or suggest using an element stocker, as recited in claim 15. In addition, JP '493 fails to teach or suggest transferring, with the transferring head 1, a suction nozzle 8 from the element carrier plate 10 to an element stocker, or replacing the current suction nozzle 8 held by the transferring head 1, with the suction nozzle 8 transferred to the element stocker. Thus, the combination of Asai and JP '493 does not suggest automatically transferring, with the transferring head of the at least one operation performing apparatus, at least one second constituent element from the element carrier plate to the element stocker of the at least one operation performing apparatus, and automatically replacing at least one first constituent element held by the at least one apparatus-side element-holding portion of the at least one operation performing apparatus, with the at least one second constituent element transferred to the element stocker.

At least for these reasons, Applicant respectfully submits that Asai and JP '493, alone or in combination, do not teach or suggest each and every feature of claim 15. Thus, claim 15 is patentable over Asai and JP '493.

Claims 16-23 are allowable at least for their dependence on claim 15, as well as for the additional features they recite. Accordingly, withdrawal of the rejection is respectfully requested.

The Office Action rejects claims 37 and 38 under 35 U.S.C. §103(a) over Asai in view JP '493, and further in view of JP-11-138367-A (hereinafter JP '367). This rejection is respectfully traversed.

JP '367 fails to compensate for the above-indicated deficiencies of Asai and JP '493 with respect to claim 15. Thus, claims 37 and 38 are allowable at least for their dependence on claim 15, as well as for the additional features they recite. Accordingly, withdrawal of the rejection is respectfully requested.

New independent claim 41 recites arranging the operation performing apparatuses to be adjacent to each other to an extent that an operator has a difficulty to gain access to an inner space of said each of the operation performing apparatuses. New dependent claim 42 recites arranging the operation performing apparatuses such that each of the operation performing apparatuses is movable in each of opposite directions that are perpendicular to a circuit-substrate conveying direction in which the circuit substrate is conveyed by the substrate conveyor. New dependent claim 43 recites providing, as the operation performing apparatuses, a plurality of modules having respective identical constructions, on a base, such that each of the modules is movable in said each of the opposite directions on the base.

With respect to claim 42, an operator may have difficulty gaining access to the inner space of each of the operation performing apparatuses. Therefore, each apparatus is adapted to be moved in opposite directions perpendicular to the circuit-substrate conveying direction, and the operator may easily gain access to the inner space of the each apparatus that is moved laterally and offset from the other apparatus or apparatuses.

Applicant respectfully submits that Asai does not teach or suggest the subject matter of claim 41, 42 and 43. In particular, Asai discloses, in Fig. 1, a transfer type circuit board fabricating system including four working modules 12, 14, 16, 18 arranged in series along a straight line. However, the four working modules 12-18 are sufficiently spaced from each other along the straight line. Therefore, an operator can easily gain access to each of the working modules 12-18 and, accordingly, it is not reasonably suggested to convey an element carrier plate holding one or more constituent elements, to at least one of the working modules 12-18. Nor would it have been obvious to modify Asai in a manner to arrive at these features based on the disclosures of JP '493 and JP '367. Thus, claim 41 is patentable over the applied references, and claims 42 and 43 are allowable at least for their dependence on claim 41, as well as for the additional features they recite.

In view of the foregoing, it is respectfully submitted that this application is in condition for allowance. Favorable reconsideration and prompt allowance of claims 15-23 and 37-43 are earnestly solicited.

Should the Examiner believe that anything further would be desirable in order to place this application in even better condition for allowance, the Examiner is invited to contact the undersigned at the telephone number set forth below.

Respectfully submitted,



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